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|  | 4—**Advanced**—A paper in this category is outstanding and demonstrates clear and consistent mastery. It may have a few minor errors that would be easily corrected with slight revision and editing. | 3—**Proficient**—A paper in this category demonstrates competency and adequate mastery. Lapses in quality are evident but do not overwhelm the reader. | 2—**Partially Proficient**—A paper in this category is nearing competency and demonstrates developing mastery. | 1—**Unsatisfactory**—A paper in this category is fundamentally lacking, demonstrates very little or no mastery, and is severely flawed in at least one area. |
| **Ideas and Content**—This is the heart of the paper—what the writer has to say. The topic should be one that is small enough to handle in the paper. Ideas should be expressed clearly so that every reader can understand, and the writer should provide the reader with interesting insights. A solid, well-defined theme holds the paper together, giving a meaningful, focused, and detailed exploration of the topic. | This paper is clear and focused. It holds the reader’s attention. Relevant anecdotes and details enrich the central theme.   * Topic is clear and focused * Main idea is engaging and sophisticated and is clearly established and sustained throughout the paper * A thesis, if necessary for the type of paper, is arguable and clearly focused, and concise * The thesis is strongly supported by well-chosen and integrated details that are consistently effective, specific, and relevant, and helpful in clarifying the main idea * The prompt or assignment is clearly and creatively addressed   Th | The writer is beginning to define the topic, even though development is still basic or general.   * Topic is clear and focused * Main idea is clearly established and sustained * A thesis, if necessary for the type of paper, is arguable but may be too broad or predictable * The thesis is supported details that are accurate and specific * The prompt or assignment is clearly addressed | The writing may be focused, but it is only partially developed and may lack necessary details.   * Topic is fairly broad; however, the reader can see where the writer is headed * Main idea is established and generally maintained but may be limited in depth * A thesis, if necessary for the type of paper, is present but lacks direction or an argument * Attempts are made to support the thesis, but the details are inconsistently effective, specific, or relevant * The prompt or assignment is clearly addressed | As yet, the paper has no clear sense of purpose or central theme. To extract meaning from the text, the reader must make inferences based on sketchy or missing details. The writing reflects more than one of these problems:   * Writer is still in search of a topic * Main idea is not established * A thesis, if necessary for the type of paper, is not present * Ideas and details are limited, unclear, hard to follow, or length is not adequate for development * The prompt or assignment is not addressed |
| **Organization**—This is the road map that directs the reader through the paper. It begins with a strong lead or hook and catches the reader’s interest right from the beginning. The details along the way should add to the introduction and should help build toward the conclusion, pulling the reader along right to the very end. It should use good transitions to move smoothly from idea to the next, helping things fit together easily for the reader. Organization gives writing a sense of purpose and structure. | **The organization enhances and showcases the central idea or storyline. The order, structure, or presentation of information is compelling and moves the reader through the text.**   * An interesting introduction draws the reader into the paper. * A satisfying conclusion leaves the reader with a sense of resolution. * Smooth, effective transitions exist among all elements (sentences, paragraphs, and ideas). * Organizational patterns are effective and unobtrusive. * Paragraphing is natural and appropriate. | **The organizational structure is strong enough to move the reader through the text without undue confusion.**   * An introduction is present. * A conclusion is present. * Transitions are present and work to link all elements (sentences, paragraphs, and ideas). * Organizational patterns are present but predictable. * Paragraphing is natural and appropriate. | **The writing lacks a clear sense of direction. Ideas, details, or events seem strung together in a loose or random fashion.**   * An introduction is present but does not set up what follows. * A conclusion is present but does not connect to what came before. * Transitions are sporadic and do not link all elements (sentences, paragraphs, and ideas). * Organizational patterns are haphazard and disjointed. * Paragraphing is misapplied. | **The writing lacks any identifiable internal structure. The organization neither supports nor develops a central idea. The lack of order and structure detracts from the reader’s understanding.**   * An introduction is not present. * A conclusion is not present. * Transitions are missing, making connections between elements confusing. * There is no identifiable organizational pattern. * Paragraphing is not utilized. |
| **Conventions**—These are the rules of language. They are the common patterns of grammar, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, and capitalization that readers come to expect in good writing. They make writing easy to read and understand. A reader may not even notice when conventions are well done, though he or she might be distracted from the good ideas that were so carefully planned if the conventions are poorly handled. | **The writer demonstrates a good grasp of standard writing conventions (e.g., grammar, capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, paragraphing) and uses conventions effectively to enhance readability. Errors tend to be so few and so minor that the reader can easily overlook them unless hunting for them specifically.**   * The writing is sufficiently long and complex to allow the writer to show skill in using a wide range of conventions. * Grammar and usage are correct and contribute to clarity and style. * End-of-sentence and internal punctuation (commas, apostrophes, semicolons, dashes, colons, parentheses) is accurate and guides the reader through the text. * Spelling is generally correct, even on more difficult words. * The writer manipulates conventions—especially grammar and spelling—for stylistic effect. * Only light editing would be required to polish the text for publication. | **The writer shows reasonable control over a wide range of standard writing conventions. Conventions are sometimes handled well and enhance readability; at other times, errors are distracting and impair readability.**   * The writing is sufficiently long and complex to allow the writer to show skill in using a wide range of conventions. * Problems with grammar and usage are not serious enough to distort meaning. * End-of-sentence and internal punctuation (commas and apostrophes) is usually correct. * Spelling is usually correct or reasonably phonetic on common words. * Moderate editing would be required to polish the text for publication. | **The writer shows some control over a limited range of standard writing conventions. Errors are often distracting and impair readability.**   * The writing is not sufficiently long and complex to allow the writer to show skill in using a wide range of conventions. * Problems with grammar or usage somewhat distort meaning. * End-of-sentence punctuation is usually correct; however, internal punctuation is often incorrect. * Spelling errors are frequent, even on common words. * Extensive editing would be required to polish the text for publication. | **Errors in spelling, punctuation, usage and grammar, capitalization, and/or paragraphing repeatedly distract the reader and make the text difficult to read.**   * The writing is not sufficiently long and complex to allow the writer to show skill in using a wide range of conventions. * Errors in grammar or usage are very noticeable and affect meaning. * Punctuation is often missing or incorrect. * Spelling errors are frequent, even on common words. * Extensive editing would be required to polish the text for publication. |
| **Voice**—This is the personality of the writer coming through on the page. It is what gives the writing a sense of flavor and uniqueness. It gives readers the feeling that the writer is talking directly to them. A strong sense of voice demands that the writer make a commitment to the writing and write honestly with conviction. In a paper with a strong voice, the reader will get a sense that someone real is there on the page, whether the reader knows the writer or not. | **The writer speaks directly to the reader in a way that is individualistic, expressive, and engaging. Clearly, the writer is involved in the text, is sensitive to the needs of the audience, and is writing to be read.**   * The reader feels a strong interaction with the writer, sensing the person behind the words. * The tone and voice give flavor to the message and seem appropriate for the purpose and audience. * Narrative writing is honest, appealing, and written from the heart. Expository or persuasive writing reflects a strong commitment to the topic as well as an effort to bring the topic to life by anticipating the reader’s questions and showing why the reader should care or want to know more. | **The writer seems sincere. The result is pleasant or personable.**   * The writing communicates in an earnest, pleasing manner. Moments here and there surprise, amuse, or move the reader. * Voice may emerge strongly on occasion, then retreat behind general, dispassionate language. * The writing hides as much of the writer as it reveals. * The writer often discards personal insights in favor of safe generalities. | **The writer seems aware of an audience but not fully engaged or involved. The result is not compelling.**   * It is hard to sense the writer behind the words. * The writer speaks in a kind of monotone that flattens all potential highs or lows of the message. * The writing communicates on a functional level but does not move or involve the reader. * The writer does not seem sufficiently at home with the topic to take risks, share personal insights, or make the topic/story personal and real for the reader. | **The writer seems indifferent, uninvolved, or distanced from the topic and/or audience.**   * The writer does not reach out to an audience. * The writer is not concerned with the audience, or the writer’s style is a complete mismatch for the intended reader. * The writing does not communicate on a functional level. |
| **Word Choice**—Good word choice involves being able select verbs that are active, powerful, and energetic. It means being able to choose just the right words to make the writing sound natural and precise. Word choice is what gives an exactness to details and helps the writer paint memorable pictures in the reader’s mind. | **Words convey the intended message in a precise, interesting, and natural way.**   * Words are specific and accurate; it is easy to understand what the writer means. * The language is natural and never overdone; phrasing is highly individual. * Lively verbs energize the writing. Precise nouns and modifiers create pictures in the reader’s mind. * Striking words and phrases often catch the reader’s eye and linger in the reader’s mind. * Clichés and jargon are used sparingly, only for effect. | **The language is functional, even if it lacks punch; it is easy to figure out the writer’s meaning on a general level.**   * Words are almost always correct and adequate; they simply lack flair. * Familiar words and phrases communicate but rarely capture the reader’s imagination. The paper may have one or two fine moments. * Attempts at colorful language come close to the mark but sometimes seem overdone. * Energetic verbs or picturesque phrases liven things up now and then; the reader longs for more. | **The language is functional and helps to convey the writer’s message.**   * The language is so vague (e.g., It was a fun time, she was neat, it was nice, we did lots of stuff) that only the most general message comes through. * Familiar words and phrases communicate without capturing the reader’s attention. * Expression is clear, but clichés and redundancy exist. | **The writer struggles with a limited vocabulary, searching for words to convey meaning.**   * The language does not help the reader to understand the paper. * Words are limited, dull, or abstract. * Jargon or clichés serve as a crutch. * No powerful words are used. |
| **Sentence Fluency**—In any piece of writing, there are many possible ways to write any sentence correctly, but usually, of those correct versions, one or two will sound better than others. A writer who can pick out those versions and can use them frequently will have a strong sense of sentence fluency. This does not mean creating longer sentences; it means using long sentences when they would be best and short sentences when they would suit better. It means creating a sense of rhythm with the sentences and a flow that the reader finds enjoyable to follow along. Good sentence fluency stands out when a piece of writing is read aloud. | **The writing has an easy flow and rhythm when read aloud. Sentences are well built, with strong and varied structure that invites expressive oral reading.**   * Sentences are constructed in a way that helps make meaning clear. * Purposeful sentence beginnings show how each sentence relates to and builds upon the one before it. * The writing has cadence, as if the writer has thought about the sound of the words as well as the meaning. * Sentences vary in length as well as in structure. * Fragments, if used, add style. * Dialogue, if used, sounds natural. | **The text hums along with a steady beat, but it tends to be more pleasant or businesslike than musical, more mechanical than fluid.**   * Sentences may not seem artfully crafted or musical, but they are usually grammatical. They hang together and get the job done. * There is at least some variation in sentence length and structure. Sentence beginnings are not all alike. * The reader sometimes has to hunt for clues (e.g., connecting words and phrases like *however, therefore, naturally, after a while, on the other hand, to be specific, for example, next, first of all, later, as it turned out, although,* etc.) that show how sentences interrelate. * Parts of the text invite expressive oral reading; others may be stiff, awkward, choppy, or gangly. Overall though, it is pretty easy to read the paper aloud with a little practice. | **The reader has to practice quite a bit in order to give this paper a fair interpretive reading.**   * Most simple sentences are grammatically correct, but complex sentences are rarely used or rarely grammatical. * Sentence rhythm is attempted but inconsistent. Many sentences begin the same way. * Phrasing does not sound natural, the way someone might speak. The reader must sometimes pause or read over to get the meaning. * The text does not invite expressive oral reading. | **The writing is awkward. There is no “sentence sense” in this paper.**   * Sentences are choppy, incomplete, rambling, clumsy, or jarring; they need work. * Endless connectives (*and, so, and so, but then, because, and then*, etc.) create a massive jumble of language in which clear sentence beginnings and endings get swallowed up. * Phrasing is not natural, causing confusion for the reader. * Expressive oral reading is impossible. |